Extract 2 Section 1

1. Daigo suddenly felt like playing the cello as he holds many doubts about his future. He questions whether he was placed in this situation as a punishment for not nursing his mother on her deathbed. His awful experience handling the dead lady’s body prompted him to think back to why he had to be tested in this way. As he tried to recall his memory, he simply felt an urge to play the cello, as if the playing of the cello can help him recall what he had lost in his memory.
2. Daigo has sold his cello but found his old cello he used to play as a child at his mother’s home. He opened it and found a rock wrapped up in a piece of music score which seemed to make him remember something about his past. As he starts to play, flashbacks of his childhood scenes unfolds. The audience get a glimpse of his childhood life. This piece of music is Daigo’s father’s favourite piece, as the audience will find out later in the film. This music not only is something he had been practicing since he was a child, but also represents the good old times he had with his family. However, in his flashbacks, his mother’s image is clear and vivid, whereas his father’s face was all but a blur.
3. The director intends to use the scene of salmon going back to the river where they are born to reproduce and die to support the theme of life and death being a unbroken cycle. The scene helps to suggest the continuous cycle of life and death. It is inevitable of all things living will die, but the reproduction of next generations continue the cycle of life in a matter-of-course manner. Secondly, the salmon seem to also mirror Daigo’s current situation. He has chosen to return to his hometown with his wife. His comment that the salmon are heading to a sad death reflects his current mental state. He does not understand the reason why the salmon would to go through such traumatic process to swim up the river. However, the audience will later find out that Daigo will eventually settle down in his hometown and have children. This line/scene contrasts strongly with Daigo’s job as an undertaker, as well as his later realisation that death is in every way as meaningful/deserving of respect as life. Hirata, as an old man, holds a very different view when watching the salmon. He encourages the salmon to continue with their journey because he understands that everyone has an intrinsic/instinctive desire to return to one’s hometown. Thus Hirata says that the salmon “would like to go back to their hometown”.
4. When Sasaki drove past the river and startled Daigo with his horn, he ordered Daigo to go and have a meal together. Daigo was slightly annoyed as he questioned him whether it was coincidence that he passed by. He was just agonising over his situation (i.e. his new job and life) when Sasaki just happened to drive past. He could not believe that it was by chance. He felt he was forced into taking up the job as an undertaker.
5. Mr Sasaki says that Daigo is born for this job probably because he believes Daigo has the right aptitude for the job, having survived his first job. However, from a more practical point of view, Sasaki probably thinks that it is extremely difficult to find a prospective young man in a country town in the profession of undertakers. Therefore, he would pull all strings to entice him to stay in the job. Therefore, by saying that it is Daigo’s true calling, he is in a way directing the lost Daigo into the direction he wants him to go.
6. Write the English meaning of the following words:
   1. 罰 punishment
   2. 記憶 memory
   3. 切ない sad/painful
   4. 偶然 coincidence
   5. 運命 fate/destiny
   6. 天職 true calling/true vocation
   7. 生まれ故郷 hometown where one was born (The significance of word not only lies in the physical town where one was born, but it also represents the place that you are attached to and where you belong to.)
7. Student’s own work

Extract 2 Section 2

1. The chief mourner is extremely sad and angry because he has lost a dear one, and the encoffiners were late for the ritual. He was taking out his anger on Sasaki and Daigo. While we understand that grief has caused the chief mourner to make such an abusive remark (“You make a living out of the dead”), this reflects the social stigma attached to the profession of encoffiners.
2. The language Sasaki employs in this scenes is very polite and business like. The use of respectful language is evident throughout the scene. One example is: おフタを閉じさせていただきます。= May I have the privilege/permission of closing the lid/I will affix the coffin lid.
3. Answers already provided in question.
4. As Sasaki prepares the body, non-diagetic music was not used as the director wants to involve the audience as part of the scene. The absence of noise/music also reinforces the solemnity of the scene. This is further supported by the use of camera angles (high and low angle shots, close shots of facial expressions and preparation of body). The audience watch the ritual as part of the family using a back shot of the family. We are also taken down to the eye level (low angle shots) of the mourners and Daigo in order to assist us empathize with the characters.
5. Having watched Sasaki prepared his wife’s body, the chief mourner has calmed down and was finally able to mourn. At the end of the scene, he went out to apologise for his rude remark earlier, and to also thank them for their work. As a token of his gratitude, he gave Sasaki and Daigo some homemade dried persimmon wrapped up in newspaper. This shows how deeply appreciative he was as he just wanted to give them something, even though it might be something plain prepared in a haste.
6. He said that his wife had never looked prettier, intending to praise/thank Sasaki’s work. It was also a sign that he has come to a closure in his mourning for his wife. This line shows that he has fully appreciated the meaning and value of their work. The peacefulness and calmness of the ritual help the family recover their composure and be reminded of the love they have for each other.
7. Student’s own work.

Extract 4 Section 1

1. Why is Mika startled by the 電報?

The telegram was addressed to Kazuko, Daigo’s mother who passed away two years ago. The content of the telegram announced that Daigo’s father has passed away.

1. Why does the postman say困ります？

He said it would be problematic because Mika took the telegram and opened it even though it was not addressed to her.

1. Mr Sasaki seems disinterested. Comment.

He lies on the sofa reading a book when Uemura informed Daigo that his father had died. Sasaki knew all along that Daigo has always felt resentment towards his father. On Christmas evening, he even said that his father is probably dead in an emotionless tone. Knowing this, Sasaki probably does not wish to intrude and impose any feeling onto Daigo. He is waiting to see how Daigo responds to the news, and when necessary, he would be happy to offer any assistance.

1. Why does Daigo respond with 誰の andどういうこと…ですか?

He asks whose father had died and when a confirmed answer was received, he was shocked and asked “what do you mean?”. This news came as a total surprise and he had not yet fully comprehended what had happened.

1. Provide the words from the extract
   1. あなたの家＝お宅
   2. いませんか＝いらっしゃいませんか
   3. だんなさんのお母さん＝義母
   4. かえりました＝戻りました
   5. どんないみですか＝どういうことですか
   6. 死んだ＝亡くなった
2. The withering of flowers (i.e. sakura=cherry blossom) is often used as a metaphor for the passing of human life. The cherry blossom bloom so lavishly yet so short lived. It is likened to the ideal way of how to end one’s life – having achieved something wonderful yet die so quickly.
3. The scene is set in spring where everything is full of life – lights, flowers, green trees, and blue sky. However, the story tells of the passing of an old man’s life, creating a stark contrast.

**Writing:**

**Write thet script of the conversation between Sasaki and Uemura before Daigo comes back to work.**

**Speaking:**

**In times of difficulty, iti s essential to have family support. What do you think?**